

Computers and Internet
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Don Rotolo, N2IRZ

There is more out there than we can even imagine. I learned this the hard way, and I'd like to share a bit of that experience with you.

I sat down at the keyboard four weeks ago with every intention of fulfilling my promise from September, to write a column exploring the various software packages offered for contact logging. Having picked up a half-dozen info sheets at Dayton, I figured I'd download the sample versions, use them a little, and dash off an article. No such luck.

As it turns out, after just a little bit of searching, I was confronted with nearly 50 commercial offerings, and double that in freeware. Most of these are not simple databases, as I had expected, but full-fledged station management systems. Most programs available will not only log your contacts, but also control your rig and rotor, print out QSL labels, alert you if a station is needed or a duplicate, handle DX Cluster spots, let you know where you stand for awards and during a contest, CW keying and decoding, maps - the list goes on and on.

Note to self: Don't promise something in a field you know nothing about.

It very quickly became obvious even to me that there is no way I could compare features intelligently between all these offerings. I'm not the type to write about something I'm not certain of, so faking it was right out. The conclusion I came to was that I'd have to find something else to write about for the last column of the second millenium. If there's anyone out there who was really looking forward to what I promised in September, a comparison of logging software, I apologize, because it isn't going to happen this month.

Just briefly, if you're interested in getting some logging software, do some research into the following programs, which seem to be the most popular ones (in alphabetical order): CT by K1EA, DXBase 2001 from Scientific Solutions, DX4WIN/32 from Rapidan Data Systems, Log Windows from Creative Services Software, Log EQF by N3EQF, LOGic 5 from Personal Database Applications, Prolog2k from Datamatrix, TR-Log by N6TR, and the WJ2O Master QSO Logging Program. You'll find most of these advertised in the pages of CQ. Also, have a look at the list at <<http://www.ac6v.com/pageplog.html>>.

Now for something completely different.

It was recently announced that only about 18% of all hams signed up for the FCC's much-touted Universal Licensing System (ULS). Although nobody knows for sure, most speculation for the low compliance rate revolves around the need to give the FCC your Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) which, for most of us, is our Social Security Number. It seems that people value

their privacy, and I tend to agree. When it comes to your SSN, you simply cannot be too careful - that number is the key to your financial kingdom and should be guarded jealously.

Another possibility is much less sinister: It's just that the remaining 82% of us just haven't had to transact any business with the FCC, and therefore did not have any reason to sign up for ULS.

Besides the TIN issue, which may or may not be exaggerated, there was also the browser issue: You were required to have Netscape Navigator as your Internet browser in order to use ULS. If you're like me - Microsoft Windows whether you like it or not - there wasn't much sense in signing up. These issues became obvious to even the FCC, prompting them to replace the 'people tracking' parts of ULS with a new system names CORES.

CORES, short for COMmission REGistration System, was developed from the ground up, and this time they did a very good job. The main purpose for CORES is to provide a unique FCC Registration Number (FRN) for each entity doing business with the FCC. Eventually, you will be able to use your FRN to conduct all FCC business, without the vulnerability of divulging your TIN via the Internet. The FRN essentially replaces the TIN as the unique number used to unambiguously identify a person.

Note that the need to provide the FCC with your TIN has nothing to do with the ability to access your records on-line. Instead, it was mandated by Congress as another means of denying Federal services to those who owe money to the government, or for other reasons should not receive certain government services. While there are some who point their fingers and shout "Big Brother" about this Orwellian way of doing business, I for one agree with the idea, since I have nothing to hide. I also have resigned myself to accept that the Government already has my Social Security Number, and if they really are that interested in me, there's little I can do about it.

CORES is kind of nice, and easy to use. At this time, you can only search the CORES database. The FCC is not yet ready for CORES to be used for business, but they will be soon. This doesn't mean that ULS is going away - far from it. ULS will be responsible for the main task of *license* administration, while CORES is the system that keeps track of the *people* who need to deal with the FCC.

One really nice feature is their respect of my privacy. Of course they don't list my SSN/TIN, but they also have marked both my callsign and home address as Private Information - without my asking! - a touch which I appreciate. Of course, anyone can go to one of the callbook servers and get that info with just my name, but the FCC has the right idea. The FCC's privacy policy is also very clear: They only gather the information you specifically provide to them, and then use it only to perform the business you asked them to do. They also collect statistical data, as nearly all web sites do, so they can monitor system performance. Not very Big Brother-ish at all, really.

Although CORES is envisioned as an on-line system, it is possible to register for, and update information, via the US Mail. You can download FCC Form 160 (Registration), 161

(Registration Update) and most other FCC forms at <<http://www.fcc.gov.formpage.html>>. You can also get a copy of the form by telephoning (202) 857-3800. Mail these forms to the CORES Administrator, 445 12th St SW, Room CY-C140, Washington DC 20554.

Perhaps you have forgotten your FRN, or not sure if you have one? Just use the search capabilities of CORES. You can search by name, address, and TIN. If you can't find your FRN, or can't remember your old ULS password (which is now also your CORES password), just call the CORES Administrator toll-free at (877) 480-3201. You can also e-mail the CORES customer service team at CORES@fcc.gov.

Is it just me, or does this all sound very unlike the Federal Government we have come to expect? Toll-free info and help lines, start-of-the-art web-based registration, a dedicated customer service and support team - can it really be, that the FCC is turning into the very best of what we pay our Government to do for us? Add in Riley the Enforcer, and it almost seems too good to be true.

CORES is a voluntary system. Amateur Radio operators tend to enjoy being on the cutting edge of technology. With that in mind, I encourage everyone reading these words to fire up their PC, get online, and register with CORES and ULS. The FCC is really trying hard to reinvent itself, and I can think of no better way of telling them that they're doing a good job than by supporting their new system.

Cool Web Site

As I wrote about last time, the Internet's main value to Amateur Radio is as a resource. Although we can always use a search engine, finding a specific piece of information in the ham world can be easier if you check with one of the many pages devoted to links. One such page, at <<http://www.ham-links.org>>, is maintained by John Woodstock, K1DWU.

There's no screen shot of the site here because, frankly, it's fairly plain. What's different about this list is that all of the links are checked weekly, nearly eliminating the time-wasting practice of following outdated links. Some of the links lead to other pages of links. If you can't find it from here, it doesn't exist. Oh, yes - John is one of the 18% who IS registered with the FCC's ULS.

Once again, another year comes to a close. This time, we'll be moving into the third millenium since some of us started counting. As I always do this time of year, I want to once again send you and yours all the very best wishes of the season, for happiness, health and maybe some wealth. We should all work towards keeping that warm fuzzy feeling alive throughout the whole year. Until next millenium, 73 de N2IRZ